

Report to:

SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD

Relevant Officer:

John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Date of Meeting:

11 March 2021

GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To review progress on the implementation of the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy and associated action plan.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To consider the progress of the GBI Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix 4(a)) and to identify any further areas for scrutiny as appropriate.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To ensure effective scrutiny of the GBI Strategy and progress on the associated Action Plan.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priorities are:

- The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool
- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience

6.0 Background information

6.1 This report provides an update on the performance of the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy and associated Action Plan adopted on 25 February 2019.

6.2 Throughout this report references are made to Green and Blue Infrastructure or GBI, which is defined within the strategy as: *“a network of multifunctional green space, which delivers a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities... As a network it includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, but also street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include streams, the sea and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls.”*

6.3 Blackpool’s GBI strategy is to be delivered by Blackpool Council in partnership with internal directorates, private developers, landowners, schools, healthcare providers, infrastructure managers and the local community.

6.4 Blackpool’s GBI Strategy has identified six strategic goals and implementation priorities:

- Engaging People in Health and Well-being
- Enhancing the Visitor Experience
- Greener Housing and Infrastructure
- Enabling Productive Green Business and Workers
- Promoting a Green Image and Culture
- Improving Habitats and Benefitting Pollinators

6.5 In order to deliver the GBI strategy, an Action Plan has been developed with 4 objectives, aligning with Core Strategy Policy CS6.

- Protect and Enhance GBI
- Create and Restore GBI
- Connect and Link GBI
- Promote GBI

6.6 **Progress on GBI Strategy**

GBI Delivery

It should be noted that the delivery of the GBI strategy has been influenced by the COVID pandemic as staff capacity was reduced, group volunteering halted, and third sector organisations furloughed, creating pressures across the Council and wider delivery partners.

6.7 Performance Indicators

The Blackpool Local Plan identifies Green Infrastructure as one of the Core Policies, CS6, in the Core Strategy (2012-27). The objectives for the GBI Strategy were produced in line with those already identified within Green Infrastructure CS6 of Core Strategy using nine policy indicators.

6.8 The table below highlights the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), submitted to the planning department in November 2020 against the Green Infrastructure CS6 indicators for 2019/20. This provides a baseline for the position before the Green Infrastructure Strategy was adopted.

CS6 Policy Indicator	2019/20 (reflects the position at 31/03/2020)
Number of green spaces managed to 'Green Flag Award' standard	In 2019/20 there were no parks submitted for a Green Flag award in Blackpool. Measured against the Green Flag award criteria, the Open Spaces Assessment found that Stanley Park was maintained to the excellent standard and Watson Road Park to the very good standard. There has been no change recorded since 2014.
Amount (sqm) of public open space and playing fields lost to other uses	No public open spaces/playing fields were lost to other uses in 2019/20.
Committed sums payments received and spent	In 2019/20 £19,027.00 committed sum monies were spent
Amount (£) invested in green infrastructure.	£104,049 has been invested in parks and greenspaces in 2019/20. Including renovation of Claremont football pitch,
Percentage of new development providing open space (or developer contributions for off-site provision) in accordance with the council's approved standards	In 2019/20 100% of developments met the Council's approved standards for open space.
Area (ha) designated as green belt	There has been no change in the area designated as Green Belt
Number of developments approved in the green belt	No developments were approved in the Green Belt
Change in areas and populations of biodiversity importance	No change recorded
Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest	In September 2010, the Marton Mere SSSI received a 100% 'Favorable' rating. There has been no recorded change.

6.9 Action plan update (Appendix 4(a))

The GBI strategy was adopted in March 2019 and significant progress has been made on many of the projects and programmes within the Action Plan. A complete update of all these actions is attached in 'Appendix 4(a)' and this report highlights below where the main focus for 2020/21 has been.

Objective 1 Protect and Enhance Green and Blue Infrastructure

An Expression of Interest has been submitted to the Innovative Flood Resilience Fund for nature based flood management solutions across Lancashire. This programme includes a £1million programme of works to improve Stanley Park Lake infrastructure and the water management of the park and Lawsons Wetlands. If the bid is successful, this work will see new habitat developed and significant improvements to the lake's recreational and ecological value. **Action 1.1**

Two new placements for Young People have been developed working alongside the Park Ranger Service gaining skills in community engagement, horticulture and ecological management. These roles will start Spring 2021, are funded through the Kickstart programme and in are in partnership with Head Start. **Action 1.1**

A European Regional Development Fund programme of carbon reduction measures across Grange Park was successful. This includes an £87,000 programme of tree planting starting in Autumn 2021. The fund allows for over 2000 mature and young trees to be planted in open spaces, verges and resident's gardens across Grange Park. **Action 1.2**

Blackpool's Open Spaces Assessment, which highlights the current condition of all Blackpool Parks and open spaces, has been used to direct future priorities and create Park Development Plans. These are being used to create targeted site improvements with the view to obtaining Green Flag where possible. The Park Development Plans will shape the future management of the spaces by the grounds maintenance team to ensure a consistent approach and quality of open spaces across Blackpool. **Action 1.3**

In July 2020 Anchorsholme Park was reopened following a significant redevelopment programme in partnership with United Utilities which saw the creation of a range of new facilities including a café, interactive play area, amphitheatre, multi-use games areas, bowling pavilion and species rich meadows. Working closely with the friends of Anchorsholme Park, a range of activities and events will take place throughout the year to engage local residents within the newly created green space. **Action 1.3**

Harold Larkwood park on Chance Street underwent regeneration this year. The work included new play equipment, removal of the boundary walls to open up sightlines and the addition of tree planting. The programme which was funded by Blackpool BetterStart, has significantly opened up and greened the space. **Action 1.3**

Objective 2 Create and Restore Green and Blue Infrastructure

A draft Tree Strategy was presented to Scrutiny Leadership Board on 5 October 2020. The document which highlights a 'right tree in the right place' approach, is currently undergoing public consultation programmed for adoption in June 2021. **Action 2.2**

The Draft Tree Strategy aims to:

"To create a thriving urban forest to benefit our local community, wildlife and visitors to the Blackpool Coast, whilst ensuring a healthy, diverse and well-managed tree population."

It identifies four main objectives:

1. Implement the Tree Strategy in accordance with Blackpool's GBI Strategy, which aligns with Core Strategy Policy CS6.
2. Establish and promote a healthy tree culture and adopt the following practices:
 - Trees viewed as critical infrastructure (ecosystem service).
 - Focus on overall canopy cover and population structure and diversity.
 - Trees have equal priority to other infrastructure such as roads and services.
 - Economic value of trees recognised and valued.
 - Focus on larger longer lived canopy trees.
 - Overall tree population management.
 - Multi-purpose based design.
 - Tree population seen as a continuous resource regardless of ownership boundaries.
3. In accordance with BS 5837:2012, establish a responsible approach to developments and a re-planting specification for removed trees.
4. Manage our tree population with a proactive and informed approach, to maximise ecological, social and economic benefits.

In order to ensure Blackpool's tree population is managed in a proactive way which minimises public risk whilst protecting the trees, a tree survey is being undertaken in 2021 to assess the condition of the Council's tree population within the Council's responsibility. This survey will direct future work programming and ensure a consistent process for residents as to which trees require active management and which are safe to remain untouched. **Action 1.3**

The Park Ranger Service has planted 2,000 trees from the Woodland Trust across parks and open spaces including Mereside, Claremont and Revoe parks. **Action 2.2**

Over 50 mature trees have been planted across the borough providing instant benefits through habitat provision, carbon storage, shade and aesthetic benefit. This includes real

Christmas Trees at Crossland Road Park, @TheGrange, Layton and Revoe centres. **Action 2.2**

A new playing pitch plateau 115,000sq is being developed at Common Edge as part of the wider Enterprise Zone developments which will include a 3G pitch and new changing room facilities. It is anticipated that the pitches will be ready for play in September 2021 following a successful spring and summer growing season. **Action 2.4**

Objective 3 Connect Green and Blue Infrastructure

Strong links have been made with both the Wyre and Ribble Rivers Trust whose catchments include Blackpool with Blackpool Council securing a place on the Steering group for the Wyre Rivers Trust. Funding was secured by the Wyre Rivers Trust for 2ha of tree planting in Blackpool as part of the wider Lancashire Connect Woodland programme of tree planting across the county. **Action 3.4**

Objective 4 Promote the benefits of Green and Blue Infrastructure

Volunteering on Parks has been suspended throughout the Lockdowns in 2020 however safe working groups of six were able to undertake activities across our parks and opens spaces during the summer months.

In 2020 the Environmental Volunteer Co-ordinator post, which previously focused on Marton Mere was reviewed to take a town-wide approach with an updated job title of Parks Volunteer Coordinator, intended to facilitate further park volunteering and support groups to develop and gain new skills across the town. **Action 4.2**

This year the Better Start funded Park Ranger Service has adapted to an online delivery mechanism in order to engage families in a safe manner. The team created online videos of activities, introduced online groups for local families to get involved and increased a Facebook presence to over 2,000 followers. The feedback from partners and residents has been very positive, with regular engagement and interaction with families via social media channels being a huge success. **Action 4.3**

In response to the COVID pandemic, the Park Ranger Service introduced printed packs with activities for children to engage with nature and encourage parents to facilitate nature based learning. The packs have primarily being funded through Public Health programmes and another 10,000 have been printed and distributed to 10 schools across the town. An example of resources included in the pack can be found at Appendix C.

The Active Lives Strategy has been developed which will identify and highlighting the importance of utilising green and blue spaces across the town as active spaces and the cross cutting work opportunities identified within the GBI strategy **Action 4.7**

6.10 **Future Priorities**

Submission of Stanley Park expression of interest for an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to complement the works identified for the Lancashire Innovative Flood Resilience Fund application. **Action 1.1**

Development of Park and green space Volunteer opportunities for communities and Blackpool Council staff following a return to COVID safe working arrangements. To develop clear signposting of all available opportunities across the town across partner organisations. **Action 1.4**

An ecological audit undertaken of all Biological Heritage Sites (BHS) and identification of priorities for management of those sites at risk. **Action 1.5**

Continue the tree planting programme to ensure the 10,000 trees planted goal is exceeded within the first four years of the strategy. **Action 2.2**

Submit applications for Green Flag Awards for a minimum of three parks **Action 1.1.**

6.11 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 **List of Appendices:**

7.1 Appendix 4(a) Action Plan update
Appendix 4(b) Tree Strategy draft
Appendix 4(c) Example Park Ranger resource pack

8.0 **Financial considerations:**

8.1 The Action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis and is dependent on being able to direct revenue funding to the plan and also achieving external funding from partners and various funding streams available.

9.0 **Legal considerations:**

9.1 Legal considerations will be dealt with as they arise.

10.0 **Risk management considerations:**

10.1 The key risk relates to Green and Blue not being a part of 'Making Blackpool Better' in relation to inclusion in all our major capital schemes and developments.

Also not being able to release revenue funding to support the plan and achieve capital funding.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 This strategy takes into consideration mental health and physical wellbeing, aims to reduce inequalities and promote community cohesion.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 The strategy is aligned with sustainability, climate change and environmental agenda, with the value of high-quality green and blue infrastructure having a positive impact on the local environment and climate change. The focus on supporting and developing volunteers helps to ensure the maintenance of green space and accompanying activity programmes are sustainable in the longer term. The effect of capital schemes linked to the strategy are considered in the planning stages to ensure where possible that projects have a positive environmental impact.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 During the development of the Strategy, consultation was undertaken with:

1. Interdepartmental steering group
2. Focus groups and 1 to 1 interviews with key individuals
3. Councillor information sessions
4. Attendance at all Scrutiny Committees and special scrutiny committee organised
5. Attendance at Health and wellbeing Board
6. Public consultation
7. Consultation through Open Spaces Network
8. Local Business Forum
9. Schools Forum.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.